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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: MAZHILIS ELECTION ROUNDUP, JULY 2

¶1. (U) This is the first in a series of weekly election roundups in advance of Kazakhstan's August 18 Mazhilis and Maslikhat elections. Items were drawn primarily from the local press and media.

Social Democratic Party and True Ak Zhol Merge

¶2. (U) On June 23 in Almaty two opposition parties, the Social Democratic Party and the True Ak Zhol, held congresses where the delegates supported the merger of the two parties. They then conducted a joint meeting to discuss their forthcoming merger. In their speeches the leaders of the parties, Zharmakhan Tuyakbay and Bolat Abilov, stressed they were merging not simply because of the upcoming elections to Mazhilis, but because their party platforms were very close and their intention was a long-term partnership. Both leaders expressed hope that the Communist Party of Kazakhstan and the unregistered Alga party would join their cause.

¶3. (U) According to Marzhan Aspandiyarova, an activist of the True Ak Zhol party, this meeting was a preliminary joint meeting on the merger. The next step will include similar meetings of the two parties' branches in every region of the country. On July 7 the two parties will conduct a joint congress in Almaty. This congress will elect the new party leadership and will nominate candidates for the party list. Because the early elections to Mazhilis do not leave time for a formal merger, the new grouping will retain the name Social Democratic Party; members of True Ak Zhol will leave their party and formally join the Social Democrats.

¶4. (U) The leader of the Communist Party, Serikbolsyn Abdildin, showed up at the meeting, but quickly left. Some opposition activists suggested Abdildin was offended because he had not been given the floor. According to Tolen Tokhtasynov, Abdildin's deputy, the Communists do not plan to join the new party.

¶5. (U) The election law forbids two of the True Ak Zhol leaders, Bulat Abilov and Tulegen Zhukeyev, from running for Parliament. Abilov has a conviction record: on July 24, 2006 the city court of Temirtau gave Abilov a 3-year suspended sentence with two years of probation for insulting a police officer. Tulegen Zhukeyev lived abroad from 1995 to 2003 as Kazakhstan's ambassador to Korea and Iran. According to the recent constitutional amendments, a candidate for Mazhilis must have lived in Kazakhstan for the last 10 years. Out of three co-chairmen of True Ak Zhol, only one, Oraz Zhandosov, has a chance to win a seat in the Mazhilis.

Alga Party

¶6. (U) According to a report in the June 21 "Taszhargan" weekly, Bulat Abilov and Tulegen Zhukeyev attended a recent meeting of the Alga leadership. Abilov and Zhukeyev tried to persuade their comrades in arms "to consolidate their efforts," but failed. Alga's press service confirmed on June 22 that the party would not join the Social Democratic Party. Fourteen out of seventeen regional branches of the party rejected the idea. On June 20 the majority of the party political council also voted against convening a congress on the merger. Party leader Asylbek Kozhakhmetov spoke at the June 23 Social Democratic Party / True Ak Zhol congresses. Kozhakhmetov welcomed the new party, but gave no promise to join it. According to opposition journalist Yermurat Bapi, there is a split in the Alga: Kozhakhmetov and a number of the party activists would like to join the new block, but influential banker Mukhtar Ablyazov, who finances Alga, is opposed.

Comments by analysts and reporters

¶7. (SBU) In a private conversation with a Pol FSN, journalist Ayan Sharipbayev of "Svoboda Slova" weekly said that according to his anonymous sources, President Nazarbayev assured Tuyakbay during their last meeting that a united opposition party would receive a certain number of seats in the Mazhilis. The True Ak Zhol leaders then agreed to merge with the Social Democratic Party, as it is their only chance to survive and to have some representatives in Parliament. According to Sharipbayev it was President Nazarbayev's idea to merge all opposition parties into one.

¶8. (SBU) Recently, Zharmakhan Tuyakbay spoke about the Social Democratic Party's chances in the upcoming elections: "Even if

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administrative resources are used, we will get no less than 30% of the seats." (Interfax, June 23). However, political analyst Petr Svoik told Pol FSN on June 23 that the united opposition party may win only the minimum 7% required to obtain seats, which translates to six or seven seats in the Mazhilis.

¶9. (U) Well-known opposition journalist Sergey Duvanov discussed the merger of the opposition parties in an article on an opposition web site (www.kub.kz, June 22). According to Duvanov, the authorities have an interest in the merger of opposition parties. A year ago Nazarbayev mentioned that it was time to finish with the "flood" of opposition parties and that a matured political regime needs a two-party system. According to Duvanov, the Social Democratic Party is the most appropriate base for merging all opposition parties. The main opposition parties have agreed to recognize the current status of President Nazarbayev and agreed to a compromise which includes principles of constructive opposition and readiness to fight for power in Parliament. This scenario suits President Nazarbayev, who in Duvanov's view can more easily control a few opposition members in the Mazhilis.

¶10. (U) Political analyst Dosym Satpayev expects no political intrigue in the upcoming elections to Mazhilis. (Nachnyen s Ponedelnika weekly, June 22-28) The united opposition will compete not only with the presidential Nur Otan, but with the Ak Zhol and Adilet who also agreed to unite their efforts. The opposition may get several seats in the Mazhilis, which will not allow them to influence Parliament. Standing alone, neither the Social Democratic Party nor True Ak Zhol would overcome the 7% threshold. They had to merge, because the law bans creating election blocs.

Central Election Commission Preparations

¶11. (SBU) After the elections were announced, the Central Election Commission (CEC) proceeded quickly with its preparations. CEC member Marat Sarsembayev told Pol FSN that the CEC was well aware of the upcoming announcement and was prepared. On June 21, the CEC issued a calendar for the elections. June 22 was the first day when nomination of candidates to run in Mazhilis and Maslikhat elections

could begin. The CEC issued a press release explaining that candidates to be included on political party lists should be approved by the majority votes of the party's highest ruling council, and must be party members, citizens of Kazakhstan above 25 years old, and have lived in Kazakhstan at least the last 10 years. Candidates judged by a court to be incapable, or candidates who served sentences in jail, are ineligible to run. Upon approval by the party's ruling council, the lists and records of its meeting must be filed with the CEC along with each candidate's application showing that he/she is willing to run in the elections. Candidates to maslikhats can be nominated by public organizations or individual citizens can self-nominate.

¶12. (U) On June 25, the CEC issued rules on the format of information on political parties and candidates to maslikhats to be posted on bulletin boards in precincts, approved the forms of ballots including protection measures against forgery, and approved the form of voter lists. It also passed guidelines for issuance of absentee ballots; on accreditation of international observers, which is done through the MFA and must be completed by August 12; and on e-voting, which will be used in more than 1500 precincts (5% more than in 2005 elections). As in the past, the voters will be offered an option of selecting between the traditional voting by paper ballots and electronic voting.

¶13. (U) The CEC cancelled a number of its old regulations and replaced them with new ones to make legislation comply with the recent amendments of the Constitution and the election law. For example, under the new system there are no circuit election commissions for the Mazhilis elections and no election blocs of political parties. The CEC also increased the number of printed ballots, raising the reserve to 1% (compared to 0.1% in the past).

Rules for Media

¶14. (U) On June 22 and 27, the CEC held workshops for media representatives in Aktau and Almaty on election coverage. The CEC stressed the need for equal and unbiased access to media sources for all political parties and candidates and objective coverage of the election campaign. According to the CEC, the media should not

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publish information which damages any candidate's honor, dignity and business reputation, calls for the overthrow of the constitutional order, or instigates racial or inter-ethnic hatred. If media reporters or editors run in the elections they must step down from performance of their official duties for the time of the campaign.

¶15. (U) The CEC experts reminded media representatives that all media outlets interested in covering candidates' or political parties' election campaigns should post their prices for publication (broadcast) of campaign materials by July 2, and also send their pricelists to local election commissions and the CEC. Those media outlets that fail to meet this requirement will not be allowed to publish campaign materials.

¶16. (U) The CEC said that information coming from election commissions should be treated as a priority and it should be delivered to readers and the audience quickly, without any delays. An example is the upcoming publication of the names of candidates on party lists: they must be published in the media by the legal deadline. If necessary, newspapers must add supplementary pages to their regular format.

Campaign Funds

¶17. (U) During these workshops for the media, CEC expert Alma Omarova explained the rules for funding of political parties' election campaigns. Political parties must pay for their candidates' campaigns, publications and media advertising out of their own election funds. These funds may be formed from two sources: the parties' own resources, and contributions by individual

citizens and organizations. A candidate, however, cannot use his/her own resources. Expenditures from a political party's own fund cannot exceed 48,760,000 tenge (\$400,000) and voluntary contributions cannot more exceed 97,520,000 tenge (\$800,000). Thus the total amount of a political party's election fund shall not exceed 146,280,000 tenge (\$1,200,000) regardless of the number of candidates. Foreign support is banned. Political parties may not fund their campaigns with any government resources. The government, however, will give each political party an opportunity to participate in TV debates on one of the national TV channels. The channel will be selected by the CEC.

¶18. (U) Candidates for maslikhats may use the following resources: the government will provide a guaranteed minimum media coverage (15-minute presentation on TV, 10-minute presentation on radio, and 2 articles in press); the candidate's own election fund which cannot exceed 975,200 tenge (\$8,000) and voluntary contributions not exceeding 2,925,600 tenge (\$24,000). Candidates nominated by public organizations or political parties may get additional support from them in the amount of 1,950,400 tenge (about \$16,000).

Nur Otan Begins Its Campaign

¶19. (U) National TV channels recently began broadcasting Nur Otan's public service announcements, programs and news items on the party's social support projects. The broadcasts were supplemented by numerous newspaper publications. One of its mostly widely covered projects was a train traveling around the country, stopping at small settlements where Nur Otan activists talked to people about political reforms and elections and offered various types of support: health check-ups, legal advice, musical performances, shows, and sports competitions. Another strong public relations project was State Secretary Kanat Saudabayev's tour of the regions with a group of former Mazhilis members. The purpose of the trip was to assess the social and political situation in regions on the eve of the upcoming elections and to explain the early dissolution of the Mazhilis and the importance of further democratic reform. Saudabayev visited Ust-Kamenogorsk, Atyrau, Aktau, and Southern Kazakhstan. In his media interviews, Saudabayev said that people welcome President Nazarbayev's initiatives on further democratization and the upcoming Mazhilis elections which will demonstrate Kazakhstan's economic and political leadership.

¶20. (U) Several well-known politicians recently joined Nur Otan. On June 25, Senate speaker Kasymzhomart Tokayev, Kazyna holding President Kairat Kelimbetov, and mayor of Almaty Imangali Tasmagambetov announced that they had joined Nur Otan. The next day, Chairman of the Airspace Agency Talgat Musabayev became a member of Nur Otan. In his interview with Kazakhstan TV channel, Musabayev

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said that he had always accomplished assignments given to him by the president, and would always do so in future. He said that he considered his Nur Otan membership as another assignment and he would try to accomplish it very successfully.

¶21. (U) Khabar TV broadcast interviews and statements by government leaders, politicians, political observers, and rank and file people who were unanimous in their support of "President Nazarbayev's wise decisions on further democratization." Kazpravda (6-23-07) published a collective letter of all employees of Sokolovsko-Sarbaiski mining factory stating that they all unanimously support amendments into the Constitution, the President's choice of the way of Kazakhstan's further development, and the new mechanism of Mazhilis elections. The letter stated that all employees of the factory will support Nur-Otan's candidates in the Mazhilis and Maslikhat elections.

¶22. (U) In addition, Kazakhstan's ethnic and cultural centers reported on their unanimous support of the early dissolution of the Mazhilis and the initiative to elect representatives of the Kazakhstan Peoples Assembly to the Mazhilis. Nur Otan held conferences in the regions to pull their forces together and nominate candidates to Maslikhats and delegates to the upcoming

party conference scheduled for July 4.

¶23. (U) This flurry of activity led to criticism of Nur Otan for violation of the law which establishes the date when the parties may begin their election campaigns. Opposition parties accused the president's party of abusing the administrative resources and starting its campaign several months before announcement of the elections. Ualikhan Kaisarov, Director of the Astana office of True Ak Zhol, gave an interview to Channel 31 TV in which he criticized Nur Otan's powerful administrative influence, alleging that Nur Otan used this influence to begin broadcasting its PSAs and other information several months before the announcement of elections. He claimed that no media outlet would dare to run opposition parties' early advertisements.

¶24. (U) However, the CEC does not see any violations of the law by Nur Otan: Deputy Chairman Vladimir Foos stated in a media interview that at this stage political parties can be considered as participants of the pre-electoral marathon. Political campaigning begins only after a party forwards its list of candidates and after the list is registered. According to Foos, under the law on advertisement and on political parties, the parties are free to advertise their activities now.

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